

NEWS

...from the Illinois House of Representatives

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Stephen Landfear
(773) 296-4141

Feigenholtz Introduces Bill to Increase Access to Emergency Contraception

SPRINGFIELD – State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago) introduced legislation Thursday that would allow pharmacists trained by physicians to dispense emergency contraception medication to women without a doctor's prescription.

"Pharmacists may be a woman's first or only access to the health care system," said Feigenholtz. "This plan will help ensure that women receive the medical assistance they need when they need it, because the sooner emergency contraception is taken, the more effective it is."

Emergency contraception is essentially a high dose of birth control administered at once that can prevent unintended pregnancy in cases of contraceptive failure, sexual assault or unplanned sexual activity. It is effective within 72 hours after intercourse, but is more effective the sooner it is taken. In August 2006, the FDA approved over-the-counter emergency contraception for women 18 and older if they could produce a valid identification card to prove their age. Under Feigenholtz's House Bill 1077, identification will not be required to receive an emergency contraception prescription.

"This legislation will make sure that all women will have better access to emergency contraception," said Pam Sutherland, President & CEO of the Illinois Planned Parenthood Council. "Planned Parenthood works with pharmacists on a regular basis to make sure the needs of our patients are met. This bill will help us to provide even better services to the women of Illinois."

Pharmacists who wish to participate will be required to establish a collaborative protocol agreement with a physician or to work under a statewide protocol. They will have to undergo special training and have a doctor review their dispensing decisions once every three months. In states with collaborative practice agreements, including California and Washington, emergency contraception access has increased and data shows abortion rates have decreased. Studies predict that widespread use of emergency contraception could prevent as many as half of the 3 million unintended pregnancies in the United States, and 700,000 abortions. Under the State of Washington's law increasing pharmacy access to emergency contraception the state's abortion rate has dropped by 30 percent. Additionally, over 40 percent of visits during the first 16 months were during evenings, weekends and holidays when doctors and other medical professionals are not readily accessible.

“This bill is about preventing abortions, and that’s a goal everyone can share,” Feigenholtz said. “When it comes to emergency contraception, women cannot always afford the time to wait to see their doctor or return with proper identification.”

For more information on House Bill 1077 visit www.ilga.gov or contact Feigenholtz at (773) 296-4141.

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